# Tips for Effective Meetings

(based on a resource from Eye 2 Eye Development Ltd.)

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## Part 1: Setting up your meeting for success

**Before the meeting**

### Planning your meeting

*Be clear about desired outcomes*

What do you want out of the meeting? Why are you asking for the group's attention? (This could be in order to create alignment, ask them to make decisions or take action).

Who needs to be there – is this the right forum? (it can be frustrating to be involved in a meeting when you don't need to be involved!)

*Consider your audience*

What issues and concerns might they raise? What's the impact on them? What information would meet their needs? Who are the stakeholders in the room? What's in it for them?

*What information will you need to bring into the meeting?*

Depending on the type of group you'll need to give more or less detail. Try to keep the input as short as possible – any longer than 20 minutes and the group's energy and attention will begin to wane.

*How will you make the session interactive?*

If you are simply seeking to give information on a topic, do you really need to do this face to face?

### Preparing your meeting participants

- Ensure that the meeting participants know in advance what the topic is, the outcomes you would like to achieve and, more importantly, what you need from them.

- If you are sending any pre-reading material – keep it short and be clear about what you want people to consider when reading it – do they need to come to the meeting having considered a question or with their own comments about the thrust of the content? Tip: it really helps to focus attention if you pose a question for them to think about when looking though the pre-reading.

**Meeting Process** – *How can you achieve the outcomes you want?*

**Help people to think well by:**

**Starting with a positive question** (e.g. what's going well in your work/the committee's work, what are you proud of at the moment) and ask each person in turn to respond to this

- Before an open discussion create a sense of equality by giving people uninterrupted turns to respond to the question – you can do this by going round the room

- If things get stuck/ difficult, give the group a question and ask them to work with a partner and take a specific amount of time to share their thinking in response to the question with their partner (e.g. 3 minutes) – note that this is not 2 way. You can then open a discussion when you bring the group back together

- Ask everyone to give engage in active listening – keeping their eyes on their eyes and being interested in what they are thinking and are going to say next are 2 simple ways of doing this

- You may find it helpful to remind people that for the privilege of not being interrupted they have the responsibility to be succinct. Also that they should say what they think (rather than what they think they may be expected to think!). Both of these things enhance the quality of discussion and breadth of thinking.

**Get the group focused:** Restate the objective at the beginning of your session so that meeting participants know what's expected of them.

**Help people to stay with you:** Research shows that our concentration span drops after about 20 minutes, so keep any input to a minimum. Use pre-read to help you do this. You can also break up input by asking questions.

Think about how you will help the group engage in and remember what you do. To make the most of this time we suggest you pose a prepared question to the group which helps you get to your desired outcome.

**Posing the right question is critical.** If you pose a general question (e.g. what do you think? Any questions?), you will get general answers. So, choose a question which will help focus the discussion on the area you have chosen (check this out by thinking about how you would respond to the question you have in mind). Here are some examples to help you:

- What does success look like?
- What are we already doing that is working well?
- What can we do to achieve success?

- What are the key changes you can identify?
- How will these changes impact you/ the team/ the organization?
- What do we need to do to ensure this works for us?
- What are our options?
- What are our success criteria?
- Which option is the best fit with our criteria?
- What are the implications of this decision for the people involved?
- What might get in the way of this? What issues can you see?
- How can we reduce the impact of these? What options can you identify to overcome these?
- Which option should we pursue?
- What do we need to do to move forward?
- What do we need to do to implement this?
- What's the way forward?
- How could we tackle this issue?

Give the group time to explore one question before moving on to another – for example, it's hard to identify problems and solve them at the same time!

**Seeking alignment**
If you are seeking alignment – silence isn't it! Ask the group where they do/ don't agree and why and then ask for their commitment (this takes time and is generally underestimated!).

Allowing the right amount of time: If you are prompting debate/ discussion or looking for alignment, a rule of thumb is to allow half the allotted time for this.

**Closing the feedback loop:** At the end of your session, summarize any decisions/ actions/ next steps (ideally put them on flip chart through the session) to check for commitment and agreement. Remember to be clear about who does what, when and how you will follow up.

**Finish on a high note:** Getting each person in the group to say something positive can really build team cohesion and motivation in the long term. You could do this by asking each person in turn to say 1 thing that went well in the meeting. It can be even more powerful if the appreciation is individual e.g. one quality you admire in the person to your left/right.

## Part 2: Crafting an Effective Agenda

**Construct your agenda in a way that helps people to think and prepare by**
- Stating the purpose for an agenda item

- Posing the agenda item as a question e.g. how can we bring our budget back on track? rather than budget overrun review
- Pose questions for people to consider in advance in relation to agenda items or any pre-read material you send out

**Other items to consider including depending on the meeting:**

- Purpose/ Objectives of meeting
- Date, Time, Location
- Who is invited/ attended
- Item/topics for discussion, key outcomes, preparation needed, who will lead/own the topic, duration
- Actions (What, by whom, by when)
- Key decisions log/Action Items/Next Steps/Follow-up Items
- Items carried forward for future meetings

**How to use**

- Prepare & circulate in advance of session/ within agreed period after the meeting (e.g. 2 days)
- Can be updated and used as an ongoing record (completed actions deleted, new ones added)

**Useful for**

- Providing ongoing record of agreed actions, decisions.
- Ensuring everyone knows what the meeting is about and what they need to do in advance
- Progress meetings so that you can ensure actions are followed up/ completed

**Watch out for**

- Be prepared to be flexible about timings (but review impact on aims for the meeting)
- Can be too rigid for more creative sessions where you are trying to generate ideas & timings are unpredictable